

2024 LLOYD MARTIN TRAVELLING SCHOLARSHIP FOR EMERGING ARTS LEADERS



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As at 8 December 2024

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: THE ISSUE

As the fortunate recipient of the Lloyd Martin Travelling Scholarship for Emerging Arts Leaders, I spent five weeks travelling to and meeting with arts organisations in London, Stratford-Upon-Avon, Chicago, Washington and New York. The scholarship asks applicants to identify an issue in the Australian performing arts industry, and design an international itinerary to meet with companies and learn from international best-practice in their area of choice.

When I considered the issues that face our industry, in particular to the field of arts education, there is sadly no shortage of issues to research. However the most pressing issue to me, the one that was on metaphorical fire, was the Australian teacher crisis and a desire to determine how arts organisations can support teachers at a time when they need us most. Australian teachers are overworked, underpaid, over-scrutinised, undervalued and leaving the profession in droves. Whilst I don't think that arts organisations can solve all of the problems facing teachers, we can most definitely support them through resources, training and programs that lift teachers and their students up.

We know that programs such as Bell Shakespeare's renowned Regional and now National Teacher Mentorship deliver significant positive social and educational outcomes for teachers and their students, and improve teacher retention, engagement and student achievement. It is transformative for teaching practice, in providing teachers with active, embodied learning strategies that, when implemented, make the classroom a place of excited engagement.

Yet while the program has such a deep impact, and while we train our teacher mentors to train others and pass on their learnings, the fact remains that the program is available to 30 teachers annually. In response to the crisis at hand, it doesn't feel like it scratches the surface of the issue at hand. So I set out to meet with arts and cultural organisations across the US and UK that deliver a range of innovative teacher programs, methodologies and training, and gain insight into their ethos, approaches and models of delivery.

Could there be great ideas out there for how we could level-up our work with teachers, and approach our work in a new way? Can we work with more teachers, and retain this meaningful engagement?

SNAPSHOTS

- Five weeks – 3 June – 5 July 2024
- 2 countries
- 5 cities
- 18 organisations
- 25 meetings
- 22 live performances

ITINERARY

LONDON UK			
DATE	ORGANISATION	CONTACTS	OTHER/ACTIVITY
Fri 31 May 2024	TRAVEL DAY – SYD - LDN		
Sat 1 Jun 2024	ARRIVAL LDN		
Sun 2 Jun 2024			National Portrait Gallery, Phoenix Theatre <i>Stranger Things</i>
Mon 3 Jun 2024	Frantic Assembly meeting	Kerry Whelan (Executive Director), Scott Graham (Artistic Director)	Bridge Theatre <i>Guys and Dolls</i>
	Old Vic Theatre meeting	Euan Borland	
Tue 4 Jun 2024	Royal Shakespeare Company (London office) meeting	Conrad Cohen	Royal Court Theatre <i>Bluets</i>
	Young Vic Theatre meeting	Melanie Anouf	
Wed 5 Jun 2024	Shakespeare's Globe meeting & Presentation	Naomi Featherstone Prof Farah Karim-Cooper & Education department	
	National Theatre meeting	Alice King-Farlow, Liza Vallance, Kirsten Adam	
Thu 6 Jun 2024	Federay Holmes meeting		Lyric Hammersmith <i>Wedding Band</i>
	National Theatre Connections reading – <i>The Brain Play</i>	Kirsten Adam, Ola Animashawun	
	Lyric Hammersmith meeting	Rob Lehmann	
Fri 7 Jun 2024	Southbank Centre meeting	Alexandra Brierly, Lily Dettmer, Anthony Gray	Noel Coward Theatre <i>Player Kings</i>
	Shakespeare Schools Foundation meeting & Teacher Workshop	Mike Tucker	
Sat 8 Jun 2024			Bush Theatre <i>Lady Dealer</i> Shakespeare's Globe <i>Richard III</i>
Sun 9 Jun 2024	TRAVEL DAY – LDN – SAV		
STRATFORD-UPON-AVON UK			
Mon 10 Jun 2024	Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust day of meetings	Dr Nick Walton, Jen Waghorn	Royal Shakespeare Company <i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>

Tues 11 Jun 2024	Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust day of meetings	Dr Nick Walton, Andy Reeves, Nicola Hawley	
	Royal Shakespeare Company meeting	Jacqui O'Hanlon, Fiona Ingram	Royal Shakespeare Company Director's Talk
CHICAGO USA			
Wed 12 June	TRAVEL DAY – LDN - CHI		
Thu 13 Jun 2024	Steppenwolf Theatre Company meeting	Dana Murphy, Abhi Shrestha	Steppenwolf Theatre <i>Little Bear Ridge Road</i>
Fri 14 Jun 2024			Chicago Architecture Center, Chicago Symphony concert
Sun 16 Jun 2024			Art Institute of Chicago, American Writers Museum
Mon 17 Jun 2024	Chicago Shakespeare Company meeting	Nora Carroll	
Tue 18 Jun 2024			Chicago Shakespeare Theatre <i>Corduroy</i>
Wed 19 June 2024	TRAVEL DAY – CHI - WASH		
WASHINGTON DC USA			
Thu 20 Jun 2024	Folger Shakespeare Library meeting	Stefanie Jochim	Folger Shakespeare Library Theater <i>Metamorphoses</i>
Fri 21 Jun 2024	Folger Shakespeare Library reopening		
Sat 22 Jun 2024	Folger Shakespeare Library meeting	Karen Ann Daniels	Kennedy Center <i>10,000 Dreams</i>
Mon 24 Jun 2024			Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, Washington Monuments
Tue 25 Jun 2024	Folger Shakespeare Library meeting	Liam Dempsey	Capitol Building tour, Library of Congress visit
NEW YORK CITY USA			
Wed 26 Jun 2024	TRAVEL DAY – WASH - NYC		New York Theatre Workshop <i>Here There Are Blueberries</i>
Thu 27 Jun 2024	Lincoln Center Theater meeting	Kati Koerner, Alexandra Lopez	Public Theater <i>The Comedy of Errors (Prospect Park)</i>

	Roundabout Theatre Company meeting	Mitch Mattson, Paola Francisquini, Jennifer DiBella	
Fri 28 Jun 2024	Lincoln Center meeting	Jean E Taylor	St Ann's Warehouse <i>Dark Noon</i>
Sat 29 Jun 2024			<i>Hadestown</i> , Atlantic Theater <i>The Welkin</i>
Sun 30 Jun 2024			Manhattan Theatre Club <i>Mary Jane</i>
Tue 2 Jul 2024	Epic Theatre Company meeting	Melissa Friedman	<i>Illinoise</i>
Wed 3 Jul 2024	Manhattan Theatre Club meeting	David Shookhoff	New York Public Library, <i>Stereophonic</i>
Fri 5 July 2024	TRAVEL DAY – NYC - SYD		

HIGHLIGHTS

While the entire scholarship trip was filled with extraordinary experiences, the following are true highlights:

- Visiting the **Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC**, a real bucket list item. The Folger Shakespeare Library had been closed for renovations for four years, and I was there for its day of reopening. To be there for such a day of celebration, and to see the building more accessible to the public, was an unforgettable experience;
- **Presenting at Shakespeare's Globe in London** – I was invited by the Director of Education to present to the entire education team at Shakespeare's Globe about our work in Australia. Sharing the uniqueness of our programs, in particular our work across the vast geography of Australia, was incredibly eye-opening and prompted rich discussion and insights for the UK team. I was also able to witness the Globe team teach students and rehearse performances;
- Spending a few days immersed in Shakespeare's birthplace, Stratford-Upon-Avon, working with **Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust**. I was welcomed into historical spaces closed to the general public since the COVID-19 pandemic, and got to meet and work with a significant number of the SBT team. I also got to witness the SBT team teaching international students in these settings. I was able to ask the SBT if they would consider opening up their spaces to our Australian teachers via virtual platforms, and it is something we are discussing;
- Witnessing other companies and artists teach Shakespeare – it is a gift to see the same content taught by new artists, in new ways. I was particularly inspired and impressed by the work of the **Shakespeare Schools Foundation** in London, where I was able to participate in a teacher workshop and experience their knowledge and skills first-hand;

- Meeting **Jacqui O'Hanlon OBE**, Director of Education at the **Royal Shakespeare Company**, who is a trailblazer and international leader in our field, and I was told by many people that I would likely not attain a meeting with her. I not only got to meet her, but established a new, vivid connection and we look forward to further discussions and potential collaborations;
- Meeting the inspirational education team at **Steppenwolf Theatre Company** in Chicago, touring their spaces and visiting their brand-new education building. I was also fortunate to see the first preview of a new work performed, *Little Bear Ridge Road*;
- On my travels being connected to and meeting with companies I had never previously heard about, including **Epic Theater Ensemble** and **Roundabout Theatre Company**, who were highly influential in shifting my thinking about education, and instrumental in my research and findings. I continue to speak with and collaborate with these companies; and
- As an unofficial highlight of the trip, were the many live performances I got to see, the many galleries and exhibitions and arts institutions I was able to immerse myself in across the US and the UK. I made it a personal mission to make sure I experienced art works and forms that I would not normally seek out. This developed not only my arts career and insights, but also my work as an artist and my development as a human being in this complex world.



Figure 1: Folger Shakespeare Library Washington DC

KEY LEARNINGS

Every single meeting and connection taught me something and gave me more questions to think about, more to research. The learnings are substantial and will stay with me for years to come. Here are a few key insights and lessons from my scholarship trip:

WHY 'SCALE' WHEN YOU CAN DEEPEN?

My key research question hinged on how to scale our programs and work with more teachers. I was surprised that on many occasions, I was met with the question of 'Why?' At the Royal Shakespeare Company we discussed scaling as an ethical question – rather than "How?", the question was "should we?" The resounding lesson for me on meeting with international organisations was to challenge this idea and instead ask, 'Why scale when you can deepen?'

I found ample examples of companies working deeper with fewer schools and people, giving more resources in a more profound way. Examples such as Steppenwolf Theatre Company's Young Adult Council (YAC) works with just 20-30 teenagers each year, for the entirety of their schooling. The Lincoln Center Theatre work with just 15 schools annually, on timeframes of 10 – 20 consecutive years. They are comfortable to turn schools away and redirect them to other organisations.

As arts companies we can too often find ourselves steering towards requests and stretching our already limited resources too thin. Why not pour more resources into our existing relationships with teachers and schools for deeper impact? Why not plan for twenty years together? What could be achieved with that level of commitment from both parties?

TEACHERS AS PARTNERS

Throughout all of my meetings, the word I heard again and again was 'partnership.' That we should not only work with teachers and schools, but be in partnership with them. Many companies have formalised partnerships with schools or public school sectors via government. At the National Theatre, Liza Vallance said "Teachers are an extension of our own work," an idea that lit up my brain and has helped me consider our work with teachers through a reshaped lens.

Some companies, such as the Folger Shakespeare Library and the Royal Shakespeare Company, appoint teachers they have worked with into various roles in the field. This means that in addition to teaching artists delivering education programs, actual school teachers are working for the organisations. For the Folger's Teaching Shakespeare Institute, alumni of the program return to teach it as Folger Teacher Educators (while maintaining their school positions). The Royal Shakespeare Company has an Associate

Schools Program, and along with this, appoint Associate Teacher Leaders in schools in various areas. These teacher leaders become a touchpoint for local teachers accessing RSC's programs, and the additional experience can lead them to a higher teaching pay bracket. It is an inspiring idea, particularly for a company like ours that works with teachers in nearly every pocket of this vast country. I will be looking to this as a model for empowering our own alumni teachers, and supporting regional schools where we can not always have a physical presence.

THE TEACHER AS ARCHITECT

One of the main reasons for visiting the Folger Shakespeare Library (and Frantic Assembly in London) was that they have formalised their teaching approaches into a methodology. The Folger Method is a proven framework for the dynamic teaching of Shakespeare in classrooms, and described as a 'radical engine for equity.'. This framework, established by Dr Peggy O'Brien, enables a student-led approach, with the teacher as 'architect'. Rather than a traditional model of teachers-as-expert, the Folger Method encourages teachers to scaffold a lesson so they can 'get out of the way' of student learning. This releases the teacher from the burden of being the expert, and trying to micromanage and dictate every outcome of the student achievement and learning process.

Such an approach empowers young people to take charge of their own learning, celebrate all ideas, where all voices are amplified, and students are welcome to bring their whole self' to classroom discussions. Ultimately, as the Folger team explains, every student realises they can do hard things, like Shakespeare, on their own.

INTEGRATING THE ARTS INTO ALL SUBJECT AREAS

We often talk about how embodied learning can be applied to other subjects, but we rarely engage with teachers from subject areas other than English and the Arts.

In New York I was introduced to companies including Epic Theater Ensemble who use theatre as a tool for promoting vital discourse and social change, inspiring young people to be creative and engaged citizens, making work about key issues. In this way, theatre is integrated in all subjects, including history and science.

Roundabout Theatre Company delivers the Theatrical Teaching Institute which has direct parallels with Bell Shakespeare's National Teacher Mentorship. However, Roundabout's School Partnerships program involves an entire school being trained in Roundabout approaches. Roundabout's approach to teacher training was inspired by Aristotle's Elements of Theatre, advocating that the six Elements of Theatre – Plot, Character, Theme, Language, Rhythm and Spectacle – should be present in every single lesson. Not just a Drama lesson, we're talking maths, science, history, geography, PE, all subjects. School Principals sign up their entire staff body to this

training, to integrate theatrical ideas into the delivery of educational content. The program establishes parallels to educational components such as academic content, lesson plans, structure, classroom setting, and teaching style.

THE VALUE OF LEADERSHIP

I met with organisations of varying size, from 5-person teams to large companies such as the National Theatre, the Southbank Centre and the Royal Shakespeare Company. It was wonderful to hear in my meetings with these organisations and many others, about the work being done in regards to leadership in the industry.

The Royal Shakespeare Company demonstrates leadership in many ways, but most importantly, through research. They are the only theatre in the world to have Independent Research Organisation (IRO) status, and have a team of researchers within their permanent staff. One of the realities of our industry is that we are small teams doing high-impact work, yet we have neither the resources nor time to effectively study and therefore communicate the impact of our work. Organisations like the RSC take the lead in funding and undertaking powerful research such as their latest report, [*Time To Act*](#), which demonstrates the impact that the RSC's education programs have had on the language, social and emotional development of children and young people. Research is in the ethos of the company and drives and cultivates philanthropy – ring-fenced transformational gifts for evidence-based research. This focus requires Board level commitment, and whole of company championing and belief.

Rather than lamenting our lack of resources in comparison to organisations like the Royal Shakespeare Company, we should lean on these leaders and their work. Use their research as examples of measurable data for the power of our work, and use the evidence that is already out there.

THE LANGUAGE OF INCLUSION

I learnt an important lesson about inclusion and the power of the language we use when I met with Frantic Assembly, the extraordinary physical theatre company based in Brixton UK. The company's Ignition program was a community engagement program designed for 16 – 24 year old males, in response to the lack of men from low socio-economic backgrounds in the arts. The program, now running for 15 years, is open to people of all genders and is non-exclusive, a free nationwide talent development program for young people seeking out underrepresented talent in unexpected places.

When starting the program, the company realised that the young people in the communities they wanted to work with, because they had never engaged with theatre or performing before, were not understanding what the project was. So the Frantic Assembly team looked to what they did know, and adapted their language to suit. The young people in the community knew sport, specifically football, and so auditions

became 'trials,' rehearsals became 'training', and it followed that all aspects of the theatremaking process could be adapted to suit what was in their comfort zone and knowledge circle. The programme has now engaged with over 10,000 young people, with over 55% of graduates working in theatre and television and creative industries. Many have taken the importance of creative thinking and collaboration and applied it to their world beyond the arts.

How many times do we do well-intentioned work with marginalised young people or communities and use our own language of our art forms, when we could adapt to make more sense and connection? Who would we miss out on connecting with, whose voices and whose talent would be missed?

ARTS VENUES AS INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY SPACES

I was inspired to see arts venues used as community spaces throughout my travels. This was particularly evident in London where arts organisations such as the National Theatre, Southbank Centre and Young Vic Theatre opened their doors to the general public. Throughout the day, at a time when traditionally theatres are dark and quiet spaces, these venues were a hubbub of activity. Remote work spaces were filled with people working on laptops, having meetings. It did not seem to matter whether the people using the spaces were there to see theatre or not, they were welcome to use the space. Infrastructure was set up to accommodate and encourage longer stays – cafes served food and drinks, shops were open, WiFi was accessible and powerpoints were plentiful for people to plug in and work. Signs on the wall encouraged inclusivity and spoke to the organisation's values.

It was a stark contrast to the 'dead' spaces in our Australian arts organisations and made me realise how closed off and unwelcoming our spaces can be. In regards to Bell Shakespeare's home at Pier 2/3, we have ample and open spaces that are vacant and could be utilised to welcome people in to work and meet during day time hours, which might in turn encourage new audiences into our venues and introduce them to our work.

PHYSICAL ACCESS TO ARTS VENUES

I was similarly inspired to see arts organisations that have worked to address issues in physical access to their venues. In regards to the Walsh Bay Arts Precinct, this is a recent, waterside arts precinct that does not yet have the infrastructure to bring audiences to the venue. We have a spectacular location yet it is tucked away and off major public transport routes. It is particularly difficult to access for people with physical access needs. I was heartened to see the work of the John F Kennedy Center in Washington DC. This venue, like Pier 2/3, is also in a tucked away, spectacular waterside location. However the Kennedy Center have a number of transport options to offer audiences. In addition to public transport, red Kennedy Center shuttle buses take

audiences back and forth from train stations. E-bike and bicycle stations line the venue surrounds and are used enthusiastically by patrons, connecting to local bike paths for ease of access. I was able to bring these ideas back to feed into the Walsh Bay Arts Precinct, and bring evidence of international organisations solving a shared problem.

REFLECTIONS & NEXT STEPS

This scholarship has been a profound experience for me, on both a personal and career level. It has enabled me to develop in confidence immeasurably, to learn to back myself and our work, and to share with the world the incredible work that we do in Australia, not only learn from others. In this way the scholarship trip became a two-way sharing, where I taught others and they taught me. This has, in turn, ignited my goals and forced me to aim higher than ever before. I am planning to write a handbook of the Bell Shakespeare teaching framework and methodology, and ensure this gets into every school in Australia and has real cultural impact on the way Australian teachers teach, and the way students learn.

I am rethinking my role and have had conversations with my Executive Director about reshaping my responsibilities to have more impact. I was able to see examples of organisations where people in similar roles to mine had more strategic roles and therefore wider impact. I also saw people in similar roles to me who had completed higher tertiary education in the arts education field, with the work of their company. I am considering whether I could connect my aims for the Bell Shakespeare methodology and framework with completing my own PhD.

Importantly, the meetings and connections do not stop now that I am back in Australia. Now that I have made in-person connections, I am continuing to talk to organisations and be connected to new ones. I am making plans for collaboration with international colleagues, and I am excited to keep this momentum going. I am thinking of more international travel and other organisations I might want to connect with across the globe. As someone who was very firmly within my Australian community bubble, I recognise that I am now thinking on a global scale, and not limiting myself anymore. I now recognise that I am not only a leader in Australian arts education, but that our work is significant in the international arts education landscape.

This scholarship has pushed me to think in new ways, and develop myself as a person. I am forever changed, in the best possible way.

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

- Bell Shakespeare Blog Post by Joanna Erskine - 'The Whole World Kin'
<https://www.bellshakespeare.com.au/blog/the-whole-world-kin>
18 July 2024
- Presentation at Sydney Opera House Global Goals Week '[*Emerging Arts Leaders Panel: Can culture help build a better world?*](#)' by Joanna Erskine and Anna Yanatchkova
26 September 2024

THANK YOU

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This has been a lifechanging experience for me, that will have lifelong impact on myself and my career.



Joanna Erskine
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Bell Shakespeare

8 December 2024